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## LA REPÚBLICA DE RÍO GRANDE<sup>1</sup>

ONE of the political traits of the Spanish is a distinct centrifugal tendency. Havelock Ellis mentions it as a "clannish preference for small social groups", and Peninsular history illustrates the principle. From Spain it passed over the sea to Mexico. Before her separation from the mother-country the provinces, each ruled by its intendant, knew little about one another, and cared even less. Not long after the transient empire of Itúrbide vanished (1823) and before a republican system was established, they began to claim full individual sovereignty, and the nation soon found itself on the point of breaking up. In later years secessionist plans continued to be entertained; and even during the war between Mexico and this country, not only did Yucatan hold aloof and many in Vera Cruz and neighboring states plot for withdrawal, but the formidable "Coalition of Lagos", embracing nearly all the centre of the republic, became almost a national organization.<sup>2</sup>

For a number of reasons this tendency was peculiarly strong at the north. Remoteness from the capital, greatly emphasized by the wretched means of communication, had a marked influence. The political divisions of that region formed a natural group, and had interests more or less common but not the same as those of the central group, in which the city of Mexico lay; and Santa Anna, long the dominant factor in the nation's affairs, promoted the latter at the expense of the former. In March, 1845, the minister of war admitted publicly that the northern departments had been "abandoned and more than abandoned" by the general government. Business enterprises had to suffer much from official caprice, tyranny, corruption, and exactions. In California, aside from gross neglect, national troops, instead of protecting the hard-pressed settlements against the savages, harassed the citizens with insults and outrages.

<sup>1</sup> The words "State Dept.", "War Dept.", "Navy Dept." refer to the archives of the United States State, War, and Navy Departments; "F.O." to the archives of the British Foreign Office preserved at the Public Record Office, London; the abbreviations "Relaciones arch.", "Gobernación arch.", and "Guerra arch." indicate respectively the archives of the Secretaría de Relaciones, the Secretaría de Gobernación, and the Secretaría de Guerra, in the city of Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Soul of Spain* (1908), p. 51; J. H. Smith, *The War with Mexico* (1919), I. 36, II. 87, 204; Marcy to Scott, April 30, 1847, War Dept.; *New York Sun*, May 24, 1847.

New Mexico received a little more attention, for a man who gave his note for \$3000 had to pay eight dollars for stamped paper; but she experienced similar abuse. In all the northern sections taxes were levied unfairly and unequally; and, as a rule, what power the general government exerted was potent, not for protection and assistance, but only for injury. The establishment of a centralized régime in 1835, which transformed states into mere departments and greatly limited the control of their own affairs that had been enjoyed by the people under the federal system, and the cruel treatment inflicted upon Zacatecas for opposing the change, caused a profound resentment; and the presence of many Spaniards, refugees from two edicts of expulsion, gave a special bitterness to this feeling.<sup>3</sup>

California fell, therefore, into a chronic state of revolt, and in 1844 the British consular agent at Monterey stated that "but one universal sentiment of unqualified aversion to the continuance of Mexican Authority" existed there. Indeed the people drove out the national troops in 1845, and set up a government of their own. New Mexico rebelled in 1837; and, although her feeble effort accomplished nothing, embers of revolt continued to live. In 1829 Richard Pakenham, who then represented Great Britain at Mexico, discovered that Jalisco had invited four other members of the confederation to form a league with her; and he believed this combination would be made with secession as one of its aims. Three years later he reported that, should the civil war then raging continue, Jalisco, Durango, Zacatecas, and other states of the north would come together as an independent nation; and the American minister predicted that nine states would unite in forming a new republic. A little later the French representative mentioned a separatist movement in Chihuahua. In 1836 the New Orleans *Bee* published a letter written at Zacatecas in July, which declared that all northern Mexico appeared to favor some plan of withdrawal. Serious revolts occurred in San Luis Potosí and Sonora during 1837, and in various quarters the following year. 1839 found eight northern states insubordinate, and the revolutionary temper showed itself more than once. In 1841 the New Orleans *Courier* and the *Commercial Bulletin* of that city announced that all the northern parts of Mexico seemed

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *War with Mexico*, I. 16, 39, 42, 47, 284-285, 319-322, 375, 522-523, II. 510; Charles Bankhead, British minister to Mexico, F.O., nos. 89, 148, June 29, October 6, 1846; I. Mora y Villamil, April 23, 1846, Guerra arch.; *Defensor de Tamaulipas*, April 29, 1847; H. de Mesa to Zachary Taylor, September 30, 1846, War Dept.; [Poinsett in] *De Bow's Review*, July, 1846; J. H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (1911), pp. 46-48; G. T. M. Davis, *Autobiography* (1891), p. 107; A. J. Yates to Marcy, January 25, 1846, War Dept.

likely to rebel; and, as time went on, sentiments of this color merely deepened in tone. About the first of January, 1846, an influential newspaper of the capital, *La Voz del Pueblo*, confessed that many influential citizens at the north, made desperate by misrule and Indian ravages, were for secession, and evidently the editor did not blame them.<sup>4</sup>

It was the northeastern section of the country, however, that exhibited the most signal manifestations of this tendency; and in January, 1846, a secret agent of the Mexican government, writing from the capital of Tamaulipas, pronounced the idea of separation "as old as it is deeply fixed among these people". Not long after the fall of Itúrbide, indeed, a movement aiming at independence disclosed itself in Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo León, and these provinces formed a *junta* or committee at Monterey to promote the design. In 1832 a plan existed in that quarter to unite in declaring at least a provisional independence. When the Mexican troops retired from Texas in 1836, their demoralization and misery led to unusual excesses, and they became, said the *Monitor Republicano*, "the terrible scourge" of the districts near the Rio Grande. Many officers remained at the gaming tables day and night, and the soldiers gave themselves up to robbery without restraint. This conduct and attacks upon the personal liberty of influential citizens led to a movement for the restoration of federalism. The loss of chiefs, however, and the predominance of Santa Anna, who preferred centralism, weakened and disheartened the federalists. The hopes of reviving that system faded; and in 1838 the intense dissatisfaction became articulate in the proclamation of a North Mexican Republic. The following year this name gave place to "República de Río Grande". For a time success appeared to be in sight. The chief leader was General Antonio Canales, and early in 1840 he caused the new state to be formally organized.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *War with Mexico*, I. 284-285, 319-322, 522-523; *id.*, *Annexation*, pp. 46-48; F. M. Dimond, Vera Cruz, to State Dept., no. 341, May 24, 1846, State Dept.; Zacatecas assembly to national congress, July 7, 1846, Gobernación arch.; Anthony Butler, August 1, 1832, State Dept.; Paris, Arch. Aff. Étr., Corresp. pol., Mexique, VIII. 300, XVIII. 52, XXII. 16; *Voz del Pueblo* in New Orleans *Picayune*, January 11, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Annexation*, pp. 37, 46-47; Taylor to adjutant general, no. 79, August 26, 1846, War Dept.; Mesa to Taylor, undated, enclosed in Taylor's no. 79; Montiel to Parrodi, Victoria, January 9, 1846 (*res.*), Guerra arch.; secret agent, January 9, 1846, *ibid.*; Francisco Mejia, February 4, July 19, 1846, *ibid.*; *Monitor Republicano*, June 14, 1846; Smith, *War with Mexico*, II. 1; Antonio Soto, Linares, July 4, 1846, Guerra arch.; H. H. Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas* (1883, 1889), II. 327-332; H. Yoakum, *History of Texas* (1855), II. 274-280, 288-297.

Naturally the existence of neighbors on the other side of the Rio Grande was not forgotten by these unhappy Mexicans. From an early date smuggling and ordinary mercantile operations were carried on with the Texans. Even while national troops, relieved from active service by the battle of San Jacinto, occupied Matamoros, this lucrative tariff flourished; and by August, 1844, it was estimated that about 16,500 Mexicans were more or less directly concerned in it. Political affiliations readily sprang up. As early as 1832 union with Texas was proposed. In 1839 the malcontents begged Texas to espouse their cause, and the following year a French writer, named Frédéric Leclerc, who had recently visited that quarter, stated that a large part of the people in five departments were disposed to unite with Texas or—what would have meant the same—organize a government of their own under her protection. General Mariano Arista, the chief military man of northeastern Mexico and one of the leading citizens, was deeply interested in the project, and the editor of the New Orleans *Picayune* stated positively that Arista, though officially he stood for the government, exerted himself privately to carry some such plan into effect. Indeed Sam Houston, the president of Texas, entertained seriously the idea of acquiring the discontented provinces. "This he could have done", wrote A. J. Donelson, the American representative in Texas at the time.<sup>6</sup>

Attraction toward the United States also was felt. The plan of 1832 contemplated American protection as a possibility, and that idea persisted. One A. J. Yates, who visited Monclova in 1835, discovered that a strong feeling of admiration for our institutions and citizens was entertained by almost all the intelligent people of that section. Not only the reports of Texans and a few American visitors or settlers, but the finer influence of Presbyterian missionaries, helped to give favorable impressions regarding us. No doubt respect and admiration were qualified with strains of jealousy and fear, yet they were genuine sentiments; and the abiding thought of perhaps obtaining substantial aid from us reinforced them. Many in the northern provinces, wrote our minister, John Slidell, in December, 1845, admired our national character and institutions, and would gladly have placed themselves under our protection. Early in 1846 Delphy Carlin informed President Polk that he had travelled as a

<sup>6</sup> Montiel to Parrodi, as in note 5; *Mon. Repub.* as in note 5; (16,500) Galveston *Civilian*, August 31, 1844; Mora, as in note 3; G. Meade, *Life and Letters of G. G. Meade* (1913), I. 61; Smith, *Annexation*, pp. 36, 47, 99-100; *id., War*, I. 82, 149, 226; Bancroft, *loc. cit.*; Yoakum, *loc. cit.* In 1839 Texan volunteers joined the Mexicans, but the Texan government was then hoping to gain Mexican recognition and would not act.

trader more than thirty thousand miles in northern Mexico, and believed that most of the people had the true American spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The approach of war between the two countries had a crystallizing effect on all the political thinking of the people. Arista was believed to be at work, and others undoubtedly were. While General Taylor's army lay at Corpus Christi, Texas, in the autumn of 1845, Mexicans furnished it supplies, and received liberal compensation in money and good treatment. A confidential agent sent by Taylor to Matamoros in September, 1845, reported that, should war be declared, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nuevo León would probably pronounce for independence, and establish friendly relations with us. That same month an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* said that northern Mexico was looking hopefully to the United States. A little later our consul at Vera Cruz expressed the opinion that, should a conflict begin, the people of that section would "cast off their moorings and ask protection from the United States". Some of the plotting Mexicans believed that an outbreak of hostilities would favor their plans, while others feared that by drawing national troops to the frontier it would impede them; and still others proposed to act without waiting for an actual breach of the peace.<sup>8</sup>

During the first week of February, 1846, an officer of Canales named José M. J. Carvajal—who had been educated in the United States and was regarded as above the average of his fellow-citizens in character and intelligence—visited Taylor at Corpus Christi, and presented as credentials a letter from Canales to the American general. This, besides accrediting the agent, announced an intention "to destroy the degenerate and immoral Army so long the scourge of the Nation . . . and establish a constitution based upon the just rights of man", or—should this be impossible, as Canales almost certainly knew it would—to secede; and it invited the United States to obtain an adjustment of our difficulties with Mexico by co-operating in this plan, rather than alarm all Mexicans and deluge the earth with blood by pursuing a violent policy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Montiel to Parrodi, as in note 5; Yates to Marcy, as in note 3; Mejía, July 19, 1846, Guerra arch.; *Annual Report*, Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1841, p. 8; 1842, p. 10; Smith, *War*, I. 102; Slidell, no. 3, December 17, 1845, State Dept.; Carlin, March 3, 1846, War Dept.

<sup>8</sup> Meade, *G. G. Meade*, I. 61; W. S. Parrott, October 4, 1845, State Dept.; (agent) *House Ex. Doc.* 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., p. 105; *Revue des Deux Mondes*, December 15, 1845, p. 1027; Consul Dimond, as in note 4; W. J. Worth to Taylor, April 16, 1846, War Dept.; Mejía, July 9, 1846 (res.), Guerra arch.; New Orleans *Picayune*, August 11, 1846 [Kendall]; W. S. Henry, *Campaign Sketches* (1847), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Picayune*, loc. cit.; Canales to Taylor, January 29, 1846, War Dept.; Carvajal to Taylor, February 6, 1846, *ibid.*

At the request of General Taylor Carvajal submitted a written memorandum. I have full power from Canales, he wrote, "to enter into any Provisional Agreement with General Taylor, or the United States if they think proper, with a view to prevent in the future the possibility of an interruption of the friendly relations that have hitherto happily existed between the two countries", so that, should the Mexican army attack the American army, its acts may not be considered those of the people or nation. To this end, he continued, the United States must aid us to arm and support, say, three thousand men, and even loan us, perhaps, one or two thousand volunteers, until the forces of Paredes, the usurping president of Mexico, are put down; in return for which Canales will do all in his power to support the American claims regarding Texas, and will repay all advances by custom-house arrangements or an adjustment of the boundary. At the same time Carvajal urged Taylor not to advance from Corpus Christi, arguing that the two peoples ought not to come into contact until the Mexicans of that region should become better acquainted with American laws and government.<sup>10</sup>

In his usual non-committal way, offering no opinion as to the character and position of Canales, Taylor forwarded these documents to Washington; and on March 2, 1846, William L. Marcy, the secretary of war, replied. "In case of war between this country and Mexico", he wrote, "we should be ready to avail ourselves of all the advantages which could be fairly derived from Mexicans disaffected to their rulers—and considering the manner in which these rulers have risen to power, it would not be a matter of surprize if this disaffection should be extensive and of a character to embarrass the Mexican Government in carrying on hostilities with the United States", but the administration is not authorized to provide arms or money for Mexicans wishing to resist Paredes.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, probably relying on the strength of his arguments, Canales proceeded with his plans for a new republic. February 25 or March 1, 1846, seems to have been the date fixed for the declaration of independence, and both a proclamation and an exposition (*acta*) were drawn up. Indeed the first, at least, of these documents seems to have been printed. But General Francisco Mejía, now in command at Matamoros, learned of Carvajal's visit at Corpus Christi, and to save himself Canales, whose ruffianly character was

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, February 7, 1846, War Dept.; Carvajal to Taylor, February 6, 1846, *ibid.*; *id.*, memorandum, February 6, 1846, *ibid.*; Mejía, as in note 8; E. A. Hitchcock, Diary, March 26, 1846, Library of Congress; *Picayune*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, as in note 10; Military Book, XXVI. 195, War Dept.

brightened with a sort of animal cunning, alleged that his agent, really sent to play the part of a spy, had endeavored to act and speak in such a way as to draw from Taylor information regarding his plans. We are most anxious to hear something definite from the United States, Carvajal notified the American general, and for the present must "wear a mask".<sup>12</sup>

Then came the military operations of the Rio Grande campaign, including the battles of Palo Alto and the Resaca de la Palma, in which Canales had to march—but avoided fighting—under the banner of Mexico; and on May 18 General Taylor's troops, practically all of them regulars, occupied Matamoros. The clash of arms then ceased. Quiet soon returned. The field was open for diplomacy; and there seemed to be a fairer chance than ever to get the Republic of Rio Grande started, for the plotters believed they would have nothing to fear, should the Mexican army be destroyed, and the battles of May 8 and 9 led them to hope for such a result.<sup>13</sup>

On the first day of June, 1846, a newspaper called *República de Río Grande y Amigo del Pueblo* and printed in both Spanish and English, appeared at Matamoros, and exhorted the citizens of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Chihuahua to

Abandon the Mexican vulture, that preys upon your vitals—the fitting symbol of a government, that has no deeper commiseration for your sufferings, than the voracious bird upon her crest feels for the serpent that writhes in his beak; assemble your delegates within the American lines, organize your provisional government at once, and declare your independence to the Sierra Madre;

for otherwise, although the United States does not wish to make conquests, she will have to annex this territory in order to obtain a defensible boundary. "*Rise then and shout for the Republic of Rio Grande!*" The second issue of the paper dwelt upon the oppressive Mexican tariff, which multiplied the prices of manufactured articles, the advantage of enjoying a free market in the United States for all productions, and the desirability of an escape from smuggling and

<sup>12</sup> José de Alva, ed. of *Corpus Christi Gazette*, to Taylor, March 11, 1846, War Dept.; Carvajal to Taylor, March 4, 1846, *ibid.*; Mejia, February 4, 24, July 9, 1846, Guerra arch.; Alva to U. S. Consul Schatzel at Matamoros, February 17, 1846 (intercepted), papers of Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga; Mejia to Garza y Flores, February 28, 1846, *ibid.* According to a Mexican spy in Taylor's camp, Carvajal visited Taylor on March 24 or 25 also, bringing letters from Arista and Canales.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *War*, I. 166, 174, 178; Mesa to Taylor, with Taylor's no. 79, August 26, 1846, War Dept.

perjury; and on June 24 the Matamoros *Diana* printed an unsigned address of the same tenor as these editorials.<sup>14</sup>

The people seemed ready to act. The militia regiments of the important places on or near the Rio Grande would not join the Mexican army. June 13 a number of *alcaldes* met at Azúcar, and with a cautious regard for appearances agreed that Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo León should take united action for the defense of their interests without reference to the central government—a step justly described by Mejía as “the preliminary of revolution”. At almost the same time, with a view to revolt, the partizans of independence at Tampico made a movement intended to bring the American blockaders to their aid. Canales assumed a threatening tone. The city of Reynosa opened a correspondence with Taylor. Camargo, it was reported, issued a *pronunciamiento*. Letters from Monterey to Canales indicated the existence of a strong sentiment for independence there. The governor of Nuevo León was denounced as a traitor by loyal supporters of the national government, and the governor of Tamaulipas was at least intimidated. July 5 trouble began at Victoria, the capital of the latter state, and although it lasted openly but a week, it then merely subsided. Two days later the assembly of Zacatecas took an official step resembling the action of the conclave at Azúcar. Unless you send adequate forces and come promptly in person, wrote Mejía to President Paredes, these departments will be lost. “A new Star is shining out amid the ragged clouds of war”—the Republic of Rio Grande, announced a correspondent of the New York *Sun*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *La República de Río Grande*, etc., was edited by H. McLeod and published by I. N. Fleeson. *Amigo del Pueblo* means “Friend of the People”. A copy of the first issue may be found with Bankhead’s no. 89, June 29, 1846, F.O. The editor stated that no schools were maintained, and that in consequence of mis-government the annual mineral production of these states had fallen from \$28,000,000, to less than \$800,000. No. 2 and *La Diana* may be found in the archives of Tampico. *Diana* means “Reveille”. A later number of *La República* complained that Mexicans were driven to battle like felons to punishment.

<sup>15</sup> [Poinsett] in *De Bow’s Review*, July, 1846; Mejía, June 20 (“They will call the new nation *La República de Río Grande*”), July 9 (*res.*), 19, 1846, Guerra arch.; *Mon. Repub.*, June 30, 1846; Martín Garza, undated, with Mejía’s July 9; J. N. Seguín to Mejía, July 2, 1846, Guerra arch.; Soto to Mejía, July 4, 1846, *ibid.*; *Acta* of the Azúcar meeting, *ibid.*; comandante general of Tamaulipas, July 22, 1846, *ibid.*; Manuel Leal to Mejía, July 7, 1846, *ibid.*; Canales to Mejía, June 16, 1846, *ibid.*; Matamoros *Diana*, June 24, 1846 (see note 13); gov. of Tamaulipas to Paredes, June 30, 1846, Paredes papers; Mejía to Paredes, July 20, 1846, *ibid.*; Parrodi, Tampico, to Paredes, June 10, 1846, *ibid.*; Zacatecas assembly, as in note 3; (*Sun*) *Southern Advocate*, Huntsville, Ala., July 17, 1846; *House Ex. Doc. 60*, 30 Cong., 1 sess., p. 337.

Among our own people, so far as they knew what was taking place, there existed much sentiment in favor of American co-operation. Some were disposed on general principles to hail the birth of another republic—especially one that represented emancipation from oppression; and some felt, like T. S. Jesup, the quartermaster-general, that it would facilitate our military operations and reduce our expenses to have semi-independent governments organized successively, as our arms advanced. On the other hand it was pointed out that, if we intended—as we did—to let Mexican nationality survive, it was desirable for both commercial and political reasons that she should prosper, and a group of petty, quarreling commonwealths would be, not only hard to deal with, but poor and weak. Whether Polk and his cabinet maturely weighed and balanced such opinions cannot be stated; but at all events Taylor was instructed on July 9 to encourage departments wishing to become neutral or independent in alliance with us, and to promise protection during the war, so far as giving it would not interfere with his military operations. In the reasonable opinion of the Mexican leaders this was not sufficient. They had to reflect where they would stand on the conclusion of peace, and they felt that our government failed to take them seriously enough. Consequently their ardor was chilled.<sup>16</sup>

These considerations, of course, were not made public except as their influence became felt, but others had an open effect on both leaders and people. Against the argument that annexation to the United States would put an end to the oppressive tariff was placed the axiom that government, and therefore taxes, would still be necessary. The superiority of our institutions and the prosperity of our citizens were admitted, but these very facts alarmed the thoughtful. They tell you prices would be lower, argued one official, but do not tell you that you would soon be unable to pay even those prices, for your arts and industries could not compete with theirs. In Louisiana and Texas the Mexicans had been so humiliated and trampled upon by the masterful Americans, it was asserted, that flight had been their only resource. “Make no mistake”, exclaimed a loyalist, “Foreigners in your own country, you would have to hide your shame elsewhere”. Religious antagonism and racial sentiment

<sup>16</sup> (*Sun*) as in note 15; Mrs. J. M. Storms, July 23, 1846, George Bancroft papers; *Picayune*, *loc. cit.*; (Jesup) Albert Gallatin, *War Expenses* (1848); N. Y. *Herald*, July 11, 1846; *House Ex. Doc.* 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., p. 333; Bancroft to Conner, July 7, 1846 (confid.), Navy Dept.; *De Bow's Review*, *loc. cit.*; Mesa to Taylor, undated, with Taylor's no. 79, August 26, 1846, War Dept.; N. Y. *Sun*, May 24, 1847.

played their parts. We suffer, urged some, but that is better than to be saved by alien rule. Of course independence did not mean alien rule; but, demanded a high official, "Where is our population, who are our statesmen, what is our power, to maintain the rank of an independent people?" Secession would therefore signify an American protectorate, and that would be likely, not a few believed, to end in absorption and extinction.<sup>17</sup>

Nor were such the only objections. No miracles announced the birth of Messiah Taylor, *El Aguila del Norte* had remarked some time since, and the facts appeared to justify it. Taylor had now been on the ground a long while, and no American army lay yet between these provinces and Mexico City. Perhaps they were needed instead of loved. Perhaps the game was not to save, but to use them, as Cortez had used the Tlaxcalans, hinted *La Gaceta* of Victoria. "It is impossible", protested *La Esperanza* of Tampico, "that a sensible man would at the invitation of his enemies declare himself the enemy of his brethren for the benefit of the former"; and soon the managers of *República de Río Grande y Amigo del Pueblo*, finding their transparent disguise ineffective, changed the name of their paper to *The American Flag*. The worst grievance of the northern states had been the destruction of the federal system, and on August 4, 1846, a revolution aiming to restore that régime was launched successfully at the capital. This fact had a powerful influence.<sup>18</sup>

But nothing else produced so deep an effect on the sentiment regarding American protection and rule as events that occurred about this time at Matamoros. In June and July, 1846, large numbers of undisciplined volunteers, enlisted for the war, joined our army. Mostly they were not bad men, but many of them were now off their balance. In their minds the one duty was to fight, and Mexicans were the enemy. In too frequent instances no rules of conduct, human or divine, existed any longer except the law of courage. They had left the civil virtues behind, and had not yet been taught the military virtues; and they had lost in bodies the sense of

<sup>17</sup> *Diario*, Mexico, July 17, September 9, 1846; *National Intelligencer*, September 10, 1846; *Niles' Register*, September 26, 1846, p. 58; November 21, p. 180; gov. of Nuevo León, proclamation, June 18, 1846, Gobernación arch.; J. F. Ramírez, *Méjico durante su Guerra con los Estados Unidos* (1905), p. 225; Mesa to Taylor, September 30, 1846, War Dept.; J. M. García, San Fernando, to Parrodi, June 20, 1846, Guerra arch.

<sup>18</sup> *El Aguila del Norte*, March 4, 1846; *La Esperanza*, July 30, 1846; *La Gaceta de Ciudad Victoria*, July 19, 1846; *London Times*, August 13, 1846; *División del Norte* (news), July 8, 1846, Guerra arch.; Mesa to Taylor, September 30, 1846, War Dept.; (revolution) Smith, *War*, I. 217.

personal responsibility. "They have destroyed the property, insulted the women, and maltreated the men of the country", said an American officer, "and converted Matamoros into a theatre of drunkenness and brawls". "They rob and steal the cattle and corn of the poor farmers, and in fact act more like a body of hostile Indians than of civilized whites", wrote George G. Meade; and they "inspired the Mexicans with a perfect horror of them".<sup>19</sup>

Of course the Mexican loyalists delighted in spreading the reports of such conduct, and based fresh arguments upon them. "People near Matamoros, previously inclined to favor the Americans", proclaimed the comandante general of Nuevo León, "have written these weighty words: 'The domination of the Grand Turk is kinder than that of the Americans. Their motto is deceit. Their love is like the robber's. Their goodness is usurpation; and their boasted liberty is the grossest despotism, iniquity and insolence, disguised under the most consummate hypocrisy.'" The influence of such facts and such arguments upon the people of all degrees was extremely unfortunate. The idea of annexation to the United States or accepting an American protectorate appeared no longer to possess any practical value.<sup>20</sup>

The longing to escape from Mexican rule, however, and the plan of declaring independence with American support continued to exist; and the leaders were stimulated about the end of August, 1846, by news that all the authorities of the region were to be changed. This, when accomplished, was sure to weaken the cause, and in the meantime was equally sure to excite the people; and for both reasons immediate action seemed in order. Besides, instructions were issued to place Arista, Canales, and others under arrest; and General Pedro de Ampudia, who took command in the northeast at this time, inaugurated a vigorous and harsh campaign against disloyalty. Dr. Hilario de Mesa, another of the leading conspirators, therefore visited Taylor at Camargo, and submitted a new programme. This contemplated a union of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Chihuahua, and San Luis Potosí as the "República de Río Grande", or, should such a plan seem at this time too large, a declaration of Tamaulipas for neutrality. The outrages perpetrated at Matamoros, he admitted, had chilled sympathy with the Americans; his fellow-

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *War*, II. 211-213; *Nat. Intelligencer*, September 10, 1846; Meade, G. G. Meade, I. 108-110, 147; *House Ex. Doc.* 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., p. 336.

<sup>20</sup> *Diario*, August 8, 1846; Smith, *War*, II. 211, 216. *Niles' Reg.*, November 21, 1846, p. 180; comandante gen., Nuevo León, August 12, 1846, *Guerra arch.*; Mesa to Taylor, undated, with Taylor's no. 79, August 26, 1846, War Dept.

citizens were determined to remain Mexicans; and only secret aid from this country was desired. A loan for the purchase of arms, however, and a pledge of military protection both during and after the war he earnestly solicited.<sup>21</sup>

But the general could promise neither. "I cannot but take the liveliest interest in any attempts of the Northern States", he replied, "to throw off the yoke of the central government which has so long borne heavily upon them. So long as the state of war shall subsist between that government and my own, I will take pleasure in extending the protection of the American Army to any such movement, and my instructions from the United States government warrant me in so doing. But I am not, at this time, authorized to give any assurance that such protection would extend beyond the conclusion of a treaty of peace", though some such provision would naturally be included in that instrument. After a deeper penetration into the country, more would be possible, he intimated; but in view of the actual situation he advised against declaring independence before its partisans felt strong enough to maintain it. His letter was faint encouragement, he admitted; and he expected that nothing would be done.<sup>22</sup>

Zachary Taylor was by no means a sentimentalist or enthusiast. Shrewd common-sense was the usual basis of his thinking; and, besides, he felt but the smallest confidence in Mexicans of any stripe. His manner was no doubt even cooler than the language quoted above, and in all probability Mesa and Carvajal regarded him as personally an obstacle. But they knew there were other American officers, and, as even Ampudia realized, the yearning for independence lay deep in the hearts of the people. Taylor's attitude, therefore, did not entirely discourage them. In September, 1846, they laid the matter before General James Shields, an ardent Irish volunteer officer then at a camp near Matamoros. Apparently Shields considered it a new proposition, and took it up with zeal. September 18 his aide was busily copying despatches to Polk and members of the cabinet, which "embodied a proposal made by a number of distinguished and leading Mexicans" for the secession of "the three Oriental provinces"; and these were to be sent off at once by an express. But suddenly Shields received orders to join General John E. Wool, then at San Antonio, Texas, preparing for a march to

<sup>21</sup> Taylor to adjutant-general, no. 79, as in note 20; Mesa to Taylor, undated, *ibid.*; Taylor to Mesa, August 25, 1846, War Dept.; Mesa, plan, with Taylor's no. 79, *ibid.*; Smith, *War*, I. 234; Secretaría de Guerra to Ampudia, August 28, 1846, Guerra arch.; Ampudia, September 9, 1846, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Taylor to adjutant-general and to Mesa, as in note 21.

Chihuahua. This nipped in the bud his ingenuous enterprise, as the aide regretfully said, and the carefully drawn despatches were laid aside.<sup>23</sup>

However, their fruitless but cordial experience with him probably emboldened the Mexican leaders, and in November, 1846, Mesa appeared at Washington, bearing a letter of introduction from John Slidell to Buchanan, the secretary of state, and papers showing his character, influence, and representative standing in Tamaulipas. On the twenty-third he addressed a letter to Polk, stating that the northern provinces would revolt, if the United States would grant them protection during the war and refrain from annexing them. Buchanan drafted a reply, and in substance offered these guaranties. Polk, however, would not concur. "Though I did not at this time contemplate such annexation, I desired to keep this an open question", he recorded in his diary; and he suspected that the Secretary of State (wishing to satisfy the northern opposition to any enlargement of the slave area) was trying to commit him on that issue. He therefore proposed to have Mesa courteously informed that, as he brought no credentials, no answer to his proposition would be made. Both the President and the Secretary of State suggested that the other should talk with the envoy, but neither of them felt willing to do so; and finally it was decided that Nicholas P. Trist, chief clerk of the State Department, should make verbally such a reply as Polk had outlined. About five weeks afterwards Buchanan expressed his wish to hold California and New Mexico but encourage and aid the other northern provinces of Mexico to establish an independent government, and the rest of the cabinet appeared to agree with him; but Polk said nothing on this point and the matter was dropped. Two days later Marcy informed Taylor that some hope was still entertained that northern Mexico would set up a new republic. All proper assistance was to be given a movement of that kind, the general was instructed, but no pledge to guarantee in the treaty of peace the existence of such a state.<sup>24</sup>

By this time, although the old cordiality toward the Americans had not recovered from the chill caused by the early excesses of our volunteers, their later good behavior under the severe discipline of

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *War*, I. 267, 270, 504, 509; Ampudia, as in note 21; undated paper sent by F. de Garay, Guerra arch.; Davis, *Autobiography*, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> G. T. Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan* (1883), I. 601-602; Polk, *Diary*, November 28, 1846, January 2, 1847; J. T. Taylor to Winfield Scott, February 12, 1847, Library of Congress; N. Y. *Journal of Commerce*, December 9, 1846; *House Ex. Doc.* 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., p. 391. It will be noted that Polk exhibited no eagerness to get hold of what many considered possible slave territory.

Scott and other generals had been recognized. At the end of February, 1847, Santa Anna made his grand stroke in the Buena Vista campaign and failed. Soon the authorities were indifferent and the people apathetic, if nothing worse, toward Mexico. Mesa still felt anxious to set a movement going. In April a *junta* met at Cadereita, and it was proposed that Nuevo León should declare itself independent for a limited time and observe the developments; and at about the same date the *ayuntamiento* (city council) of Linares addressed the other *ayuntamientos* of the state with a similar end in view. But the people now felt much depressed. They had witnessed large military operations, and had been made to realize their insignificance and helplessness; and incomes, both public and private, had suffered grievously from war conditions. There was neither money nor spirit for bold and venturesome enterprises; and suspicions regarding the intentions of the invaders were still urged against taking any step under American protection. So the movement evaporated.<sup>25</sup>

Mesa had left Washington with a due sense of Polk's cautious disposition, and understood quite distinctly that he and his associates did not possess the confidence of the American government; but he found in the President's annual message of December 7, 1847, a remark that "civil as well as military officers" would be needed in Mexico. He therefore offered at the end of that month to serve the United States in the former capacity, either as president of a new republic or as a high official of this country. He would then be able, he suggested, to remove the existing prejudices against us, eliminate loyalist Mexican authorities, point out what citizens could afford to pay military contributions, and facilitate the annexation of the region, should such be Polk's wish. Fundamentally, of course, his professed aim was to benefit his unfortunate fellow-countrymen. Canales, the governor of Tamaulipas, and other advocates of independence, overawed by Santa Anna, had for some time laid aside that policy, but, as he was now out of power, were bestirring themselves again in the old cause, added Mesa. Nothing, however, resulted from this throw, and the war soon ended.<sup>26</sup>

Yet even the treaty of peace did not extinguish the cherished

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *War*, vol. I., chs. XIX., XX.; II. 213, 215, 220. Mora, April 19, 28, May 5, 1847; Guerra arch.; *El Eco*, Tampico, November 7, 1846; Mesa to Taylor, February 2, 1847, War Dept.; José Urrea to Mora, April 21, 1847, Guerra arch.; Mesa to Taylor, December 24, 1847, N. P. Trist papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>26</sup> J. D. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, IV. 542; Mesa to Taylor and to N. P. Trist, December 24, 1847, Trist papers; *id.* to Taylor, December 30, 1847, *ibid.*; *Picayune*, August 11, 1846.

project. Tampico, the chief city of Tamaulipas, had often been restive or rebellious under the central government, and its commercial relations with New Orleans had created and fostered pro-American sentiments there. With these feelings the inland towns sympathized, and the state in general had got on quite comfortably with the invaders. It was therefore proposed, early in 1848, to declare Tamaulipas independent, and to draw Coahuila and Nuevo León, at least, into the plan. Canales and Mesa were actively for the scheme, and it was to be made effective with the assistance of American ex-officers and ex-soldiers. Indeed, General Shields and Colonel L. G. De Russy of Louisiana were talked of as the chief military leaders. For months the project—which seems to have contemplated eventual annexation to the United States, yet was supported by the *alcalde*, the priest, and the press—quietly simmered; but in the night of September 29–30, 1848, an insurrection, supposed to grow out of it, expelled the Mexican troops from Tampico. Nothing else of importance was accomplished, but the British consul in that city believed that only a lack of funds caused its collapse.<sup>27</sup>

In certain respects, then, the movement for independence in northeastern Mexico had the promise of success. The central government had provided sufficient grounds for rebellion; the sentiment of the people favored the idea; the example of Texas was inspiring; the prosperity and probable sympathy of the United States afforded encouragement; and eventually the presence of our troops appeared to offer a large measure of assurance. But there was a lack of qualified and trustworthy leaders. Arista's chief hope seems to have been a union with Texas, which was in fact the most sensible plan; when we annexed that republic, he lost heart; and after he failed so conspicuously in the battles of Palo Alto and the Resaca, he lacked confidence and prestige. Canales was only a border ruffian of unusual energy and cunning. Carvajal could merely have been a lieutenant; and Mesa was only a schemer. The people were in general quiet, uneducated, and unenterprising, far better able to long and plot for an improvement in their condition than to work and strike for it; the long series of fruitless Mexican revolutions had left at the bottom of almost every heart a paralyzing scepticism;

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *War*, I. 102; II. 166, 214; *id.*, *Annexation*, p. 46; Secretaría de Relaciones to gov. of Vera Cruz, October 2, 1848 (*res.*), Vera Cruz state arch.; *jefe* of Tampico de Vera Cruz to gov. of Vera Cruz, August 30 (*res.*), October 5, 1848, *ibid.*; gov. of Vera Cruz to *jefe* of Tampico de Vera Cruz, October 9, 1848, *ibid.*; *id.* to *jefe* of Papantla, November 30, 1848, *ibid.*; Canales to Wool, January 30, 1848, War Dept.; Taylor to Jefferson Davis, February 16, 1848, in private hands; Consul J. W. Glass, July 8, 1848, F.O.

and resources of all kinds were lacking. Finally, there were natural prejudices against the United States; the policy of our government was cool and prudent; and the conduct of many Americans on the ground excited bitter resentment. What actually occurred answered perfectly to these conditions. "La República de Río Grande" was an interesting idea but not a practical possibility.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> (Arista) *Picayune*, August 11, 1846; Smith, *War*, I. 177-178; (Canales) Smith, *War*, I. 158; (people) Mora, April 23, 1846, Guerra arch.; Mejia, July 19, 1846, *ibid.*; (scepticism) Canales to Wool, as in note 27; Smith, *War*, II. 81; (resources) Urrea to Mora, April 21, 1848, Guerra arch.